



Montana Department of
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Brian Schweitzer, Governor

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January 22, 2008

CARLOTTA GRANDSTAFF
COUNTY COMMISSIONER
RAVALLI COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE
218 S FOURTH ST
HAMILTON, MT 59840

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On
Calendar

Ravalli County Commissioners

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Jordan

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has been developing Water Quality Restoration Plans and Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) within the Bitterroot River and Lolo Creek watersheds since 2000. The Bitterroot Headwaters and Upper Lolo Creek Restoration Plans and TMDLs have been completed. These Plans, developed in parallel with ongoing data collection throughout the lower portions of the watershed, represent a first step toward completion of the final Water Quality Plan and TMDLs for the entire Bitterroot watershed.

DEQ is working with the Bitter Root Water Forum in developing a public participation plan outlining stakeholder involvement in the process. The overall objective of this plan is to provide a clear, consistent and efficient process for review and comment of TMDL documents among a Technical Advisory Group (TAG), the stakeholder Watershed Advisory Group (WAG), and the general public.

You have been identified as a potential member of the TMDL WAG, a group with particular interests in the TMDL process and outcomes. You are invited to attend a meeting and panel discussion on water quality at 7:00 pm on January 29 at the Victor High School multi-purpose room on 4th Street in Victor, MT.

The purpose of this meeting is to identify existing water quality data within the Bitterroot watershed and discuss how this information may be used to facilitate environmental planning at the County level. **In addition, the TMDL process will be also be explained and discussed as part of this panel meeting.**

Extensive work toward water quality assessments necessary for final TMDL development occurred during the summer of 2007 within the Bitterroot Mainstem Planning Area. The Bitterroot Mainstem TMDL Planning Area (BMTPA) encompasses all tributaries and the mainstem of the Bitterroot River from the confluence of the East and West Forks of the Bitterroot to its confluence with the Clark Fork River, including the Lolo Creek Watershed from Lolo Hot Springs downstream to its confluence with the Bitterroot. The Water Quality Plan and associated TMDLs for this area are scheduled for completion in 2008.

This process is a complicated effort that will account for many different variables. DEQ realizes the ultimate impact the results of this planning effort will have for the region, and the high level of interest concerned individuals and various stakeholders have in this process. The department recognizes the need to keep this process both transparent and collaborative among the vested interests in the area.

The roles and responsibilities of each Tier of involved parties are described in more detail below.

Tier 1: *DEQ*

Lead coordination and development agency.

Tier 2: *TMDL TAG and Modeling TAG*

These entities shall be provided with final draft products, including draft TMDL document sections, after MTDEQ has reviewed and accepted products and deliverables from its contractors and technical assistance providers. Tier 2 entities will provide peer review and overall technical assistance as TMDL development progresses. Technical early drafts and technical planning aspects will be in consultation with the TAG.

Tier 3: *Stakeholder Watershed Advisory Group (WAG)*

After the completion of edits and changes in response to Tier 2 review and comment on draft TMDL document sections will be released to Tier 3 constituents for stakeholder comment. Additionally, the WAG will be consulted on significant draft TMDL components as they are developed. Routine updates will be provided to the WAG consistent with the pace of TMDL development.

Tier 4: *General Public*

Tier 4 constituents will have access to the Final (pre-EPA approval) TMDL. Prior to the release of the Final TMDL, a public notice will be posted (including public meeting times and locations, length of public comment period, directions for submitting comments...) and a public meeting (or series of public meetings) will be scheduled to present the TMDLs and solicit formal feedback from the Public.

DEQ expects to hold 3 to 4 meetings per year that will be arranged when milestones are reached or significant issues/questions arise. The number of meetings will be dependent on the progress of the project, and may vary depending on the group.

If you are not the appropriate representative from your agency or group and/or have recommendations of other technical professionals better suited for this position please contact Laurie Riley with the Bitter Root Water Forum (contact information below). Furthermore, if you do not wish to participate in this process, let the Water Forum know.

We thank all of you for your interest and desire for involvement as we work together in the Bitterroot Mainstem TMDL Planning Area and look forward to meeting you.

Thank you,

Banning Starr, Senior TMDL Planner
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